

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Kindly cancel claims 3-4, 14-15, and 18-20, and amend Claims 1, 2, 7, 13 and 17 as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000  $\mu\text{m}$ , the process comprising:

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel through heating, said hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel being one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid,

allowing the resultant mixture to stand until the temperature of the mixture becomes lower than the gelation temperature, to thereby form a gel, and

pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000  $\mu\text{m}$ .

2. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel are dissolved in the aqueous solvent, said viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel being one or more viscosity increasing compounds selected from the group consisting of xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300  $\mu\text{m}$ .

6. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the microgel has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).

7. (Currently Amended) A process for producing an external composition, said process comprising:

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel through heating, said hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel being one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid.

allowing the resultant mixture to stand until the temperature of the mixture becomes lower than the gelation temperature, to thereby form a gel,

pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm; and mixing the microgel with one or more remaining ingredients to obtain the external composition.

8. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the external composition contains a pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt.

9. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 8, wherein the pharmaceutical ingredient is one or more pharmaceutical ingredients selected from the group consisting of vitamins, anti-inflammatory agents, antibacterial agents, and whitening ingredients.

10. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 8, wherein the external composition contains 0.1 to 20 mass% of the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or the salt.

11. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the external composition is a cosmetic composition.

12. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the external composition is a hair dye.

13. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 7, wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel are dissolved in the aqueous solvent, said viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel being one or more viscosity increasing compounds selected from the group consisting of xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300  $\mu\text{m}$ .

17. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 7, wherein the microgel has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Cancelled)